

HFA-305



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

FEB 19 2004

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The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-0703

Dear Ms. DeLauro:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Food and Drug Administration's Obesity Working Group (OWG). I appreciate your interest in and support of the OWG and the information you provided about your bill that would require certain nutrition labeling for foods served in fast food and other chain restaurants. As you know, FDA Commissioner Dr. Mark McClellan, in support of my overall initiative to address the epidemic of obesity in our country, established the OWG.

In the near future, OWG will issue a report to the Commissioner that includes an action plan to develop and implement its goals. One goal is to develop an approach for working with the restaurant industry to create an environment that produces better-informed consumers. Another goal is to provide for an active dialogue with stakeholders such as consumer groups, academia, and the food and restaurant industry to develop a framework for providing messages to consumers about reducing obesity and achieving better nutrition.

I appreciate your involvement in this important public health issue, and I look forward to continuing to work with you. Please call me if you have any further thoughts or questions.

Sincerely,


Tommy G. Thompson

2003N-0338

C18/ANS

2262 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0703
(202) 225-3661

59 ELM STREET
SECOND FLOOR
NEW HAVEN, CT 06510
(203) 552-3718

DURHAM/MIDDLEFIELD/MIDDLETOWN
(860) 344-1159

STRATFORD
(203) 378-8005



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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ROSA L. DELAURO

3rd DISTRICT, CONNECTICUT

November 21, 2003

The Honorable Tommy Thompson
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Thompson:

I am writing to congratulate you on creating the Obesity Working Group at the Food and Drug Administration. Obesity is now reaching epidemic proportions, costing our nation \$117 billion a year in health care and related costs. It is time to take a stand, and I commend you for taking a leadership role on this critical issue.

I understand that the Working Group was created to develop new and innovative ways to help consumers lead healthier lives through better nutrition. I applaud the Working Group's effort in focusing on how food labels affect consumers' ability to control their weight and its interest in examining how restaurants could give customers similar information. I am encouraged that the group's work will result in positive steps to reduce obesity.

I believe that one way we can address obesity is to extend nutrition labeling beyond packaged foods to include foods at fast food and other chain restaurants. That is why I recently introduced H.R. 3444, the Menu Education and Labeling Act (MEAL). The legislation is simple. It would require labeling in fast food and chain restaurants to list calories, saturated plus trans fat and sodium on printed menus and calories on menu boards. To constitute a chain, there must be 20 or more restaurants under the same trade name, which would effectively exclude locally owned restaurants. Most importantly, it would give consumers the necessary nutritional information to make healthy choices for themselves.

Nutrition information at restaurants is needed now more than ever. A recent report found that American adults and children now eat a third of their calories at restaurants and other food service establishments. Today, people send almost half of their food dollars on away-from-home foods. In 1970, it was 26%. When people eat out, they do not eat as well as when they eat at home. They eat more saturated fat and calories and less calcium, fiber, fruits and vegetables. In addition to a variety of interventions like better communication and research, nutrition information is essential.

As the Working Group deliberates this important issue, I urge the members to consider my legislation as part of its recommendations. I believe it is a simple and affordable solution that is one piece to addressing obesity in this country. My staff will get in touch with the Working Group to discuss this issue further. I look forward to working with you.

Thank you for your consideration.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rosa L. DeLauro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rosa" being more prominent.

ROSA L. DeLAURO
Member of Congress

cc: Lester Crawford, DVM, Ph.D.